

https://www.bgdailynews.com/community/announcements/honors_accolades/warren-county-public-schools-hall-of-distinguished-alumni-announced/article_bd2a3603-79fd-5228-b9ac-f17525d51b45.html

Warren County Public Schools Hall of Distinguished Alumni announced

Feb 24, 2024



TaKeia
Anthony
Wyatt

On April 12, Warren County Public Schools will induct 12 individuals into its Hall of Distinguished Alumni.



Leyda M.
Becker

The ceremony will be held at the Sloan Convention Center with the doors opening at 5 p.m. and the program/dinner beginning at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$35 each and can be purchased at <https://bit.ly/HODA2024>.



Allison Key
Bemiss

Inductees are:

- TaKeia Anthony Wyatt, a 2002 graduate of Warren Central High School, is the executive director of the A. Philip Randolph Social Justice, Law and Economic



Dan Edward Brawner

Policy Institute and dean of the Honors College at Edward Waters University in Jacksonville, Florida.

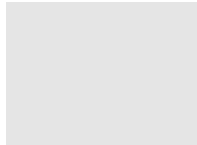


Tyrone Dunn

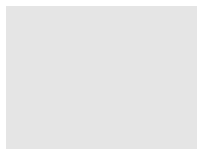
As an associate professor of history, Dr. Anthony's areas of expertise are the African Diaspora and Archiving. She has lectured and spoken on panels throughout the United States, South Korea, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Columbia, London and Ghana. She also curated the archival records of the James Weldon Johnson Branch (Jacksonville, Florida) of The Association for the Study of African-American Life and History (ASALH), where she is the branch historian.



Brenda Bunch Hale

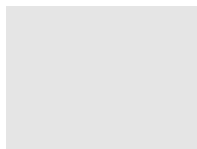


Eric W. Mercer

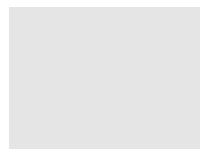


Dr. Jeff Reynolds

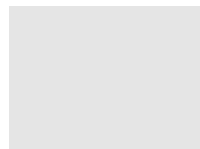
Dr. Anthony is the first African-American woman from Bowling Green to earn a Ph.D. in History. She serves on the Board of



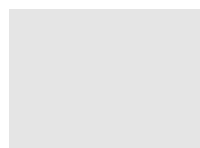
Debbie Jones
Richey



Steve Riley



Kim M.
Thomas



Richard N.
Wilson

Directors of the African-American Museum-Bowling Green Area and was the 2015 recipient of the Women of Achievement, Native Daughter Award, given by the Bowling Green Human Rights Commission. She is an alumna of Howard University in Washington D.C. and North Carolina Central University in Durham.

•Leyda M. Becker, a 1997 graduate of Warren East High School, was one of the first English Language Learners at WCPS. She is the international communities coordinator for the city of Bowling Green, a position she has served since its creation in 2012.

Becker serves to coordinate the city's role in communicating and working effectively with

the diverse international communities represented in Bowling Green and to serve as an advocate for Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons who may seek city services. Since graduating in 2001 from Western Kentucky University, she has made a positive impact in the community through her work with New Americans who now call Bowling Green and Warren County home. Her work was especially notable during the COVID pandemic response, as well as the deadly tornadoes that devastated parts of Warren County.

She was instrumental in creating the first-ever city-wide policy on language access, while also developing new initiatives to support the inclusion of targeted populations such as the award-winning

Academy for New Americans and launching, hosting and producing La Nuestra, the only local Spanish radio program for nine years.

She is an exemplary public servant who started her career working in the non-profit sector, serving in various capacities including program director for Girls Inc., director of communications for Hope Harbor and diversity and equity and inclusion trainer at Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College.

She is also a member of Warren County Public Schools' Equity Council and a board member of United Way of Southern Kentucky. More recently, she became an entrepreneur, launching Meriven Training and Consulting LLC, bringing

her expertise to assist organizations and companies in building and managing an inclusive workforce.

- Allison Key Bemiss, a 1999 graduate of Warren East High School, has served as a classroom teacher, professional learning developer, community advocate, volunteer for Warren County Public Library, as well as an accomplished author of children’s literature and educational books.

This spring marks another significant accomplishment as she will have a children’s book published by HarperCollins/Tommy Nelson, “God Made Me from A to Z, 26 Activity Devotions.” This new work combines her experience as an early childhood educator, mother and

woman of faith to share family experiences that build knowledge of the alphabet and essential sensory experiences interacting with concepts of faith.

Bemiss graduated from Western Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Science in elementary education in 2003, a Masters of Arts in education, curriculum and instruction in May 2008, received her Gifted and Talented Endorsement in May 2008 and received an additional certification for interdisciplinary early childhood education in August 2022.

She is also known throughout the community as a spokesperson for families of children with exceptional needs. These commitments extend across our community as

she supports service providers at her church and other non-profits such as Kids on the Block.

Bemiss is currently a professional learning specialist for the EPIC Division at the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC), where she designs and facilitates professional development services for classroom teachers and leaders to increase literacy and encourage innovative thinking in early childhood and elementary-age children. Previously, she served as project coordinator for the Little Learners, Big Ideas initiative at The Center for Gifted Studies at Western Kentucky University, where she wrote the scripts and directed the production and distribution of seven videos used state-wide to

inform parents regarding strategies and resources to meet the needs of students and build thriving communities. Allison also taught Title 1 Reading and Intermediate grades three and four at Briarwood Elementary and was one of the two founding teachers and leaders at the GEMS Academy (currently 212 Academy), a STEAM school in Warren County Public Schools.

•Dan Edward Brawner (1938-2018), a 1956 graduate of Warren County High School, was a constant source of inspiration to his family and friends because of his dedication to making, painting, carving, assembling, engraving, turning, inlaying, scrimshawing, bluing, browning and inspiring others with his talent and generosity.

A lifelong outdoorsman and artist, Brawner distinguished himself early in life through his art, craftsmanship, love of nature and keen sense of humor. He was the first artist in Warren County Public Schools and one of the first in the Commonwealth to hand paint the school's mascot (a dragon) on the gymnasium floor, a practice now emulated across the nation at high schools and universities.

Brawner found added inspiration through drawing, painting and spending time in his mentor/uncle Frank Fitzgerald's wood and metal shop. Encouraged to develop his art, he completed art instruction school courses through the mail and applied for and received the Ogden Foundation Scholarship

for Academic Excellence from Western Kentucky University. Under the instruction of Professor Ivan Wilson, he continued to develop his art and design skills at WKU, minored in Spanish and further distinguished himself as a scenic painter for the theater department, pinstriper of cars, and hand-letterer of diplomas for the university.

He graduated in 1960 with a Bachelor of Arts in art education. Upon graduation from WKU, he moved to Nashville where he launched a successful career as a graphic designer and creative director, shaping brands and messaging for national clients through his employment at publishing houses and major public relations firms, while maintaining an active studio practice, dedicating

time for shaping objects in his workshop and raising a close-knit family of three children with his wife and best friend, Shirley. His art continues to be recognized across the nation and globe.

•Tyrone Dunn, a 1996 graduate of Warren Central High School, is an accomplished musician. After graduation, Tyrone began to perform with his own group and with many other groups at various venues including as a vocalist for Orchestra Kentucky for 21 years, the Charleston Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina, the Augusta Symphony Orchestra in Georgia and the Winston-Salem Symphony Orchestra in North Carolina. In addition, Mr. Dunn has performed at more than 100 weddings in Indianapolis, Nashville,

Memphis and many other cities in the southeast United States. He has been the headliner in many events in southcentral Kentucky including Bowling Green's Concerts in the Park series and similar events in surrounding counties, where his band consistently draws record-level crowds.

Dunn's band, Tyrone Dunn and Kin-Foke, continue to be a highly sought-after band for various private venues and local clubs/restaurants in the region.

Dunn has a heart for the community, performing as the headliner at events including Thunderfest, The Dream Factory, Taste of Bowling Green, Hospice Light Up the Night, The American Cancer Society's benefit and many more.

•Brenda Bunch Hale, a 1962 graduate of Bristow High School, is an alumnus of Western Kentucky University and a lifelong public servant. In 1981, she began her career with the Warren County government, first serving as the administrative assistant to the Warren County jailer. In 1994, she served as the grant writer for Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon, a position she held for six years. In 2000, she was named fiscal court clerk, a position she held until her retirement in 2023 after 42 years of service to Warren County government.

Prior to her work with the Warren County government, Hale was nationally recognized as “Secretary of the Year” from the National Secretaries Association. She has also received the

highest honors from the American Business Women's Association, an organization in which she served in various capacities including president. Mrs. Hale has proudly served as liaison for the nine volunteer fire departments in Warren County. She has also shown a deep commitment to the Bowling Green-Warren County community by providing exemplary philanthropic service as a board member for various nonprofit agencies including Barren River Area Child Advocacy Center, where she served as president, as well as Hope Harbor, Operation Pride, Community Education and the Women's Fund of Warren County.

•Eric W. Mercer, a 1990 graduate of Warren East High School, has dedicated

his life to the field of law enforcement. After graduating from Eastern Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Science in police administration and a minor in sociology, Mercer was employed in law enforcement at the federal level for 25 years.

He began his career in 1997 as a border patrol agent in Texas and served there for three years. He was then hired by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). During his career spanning over two decades with the ATF, he served as a special agent in Lexington and a resident agent in charge in Bowling Green. He then moved to ATF Headquarters in Washington D.C. where he served as a project manager and branch chief of the Leadership Institute for ATF. He was promoted to the assistant special

agent in charge (ASAC) of the Miami Field Division, serving there for four years before retiring in 2022.

Mercer is now the owner of Mercer Investigative Services in Parkland, Florida, where he specializes in private investigations involving insurance fraud, child custodial issues, wrongful death lawsuits and an array of other civil and criminal matters.

He has presented at conferences in Bowling Green, New Orleans and Columbia, South Carolina on the topics of Gang Identification and Using Technology to Investigate and Prosecute Violent Crime.

•Dr. Jeff Reynolds, a 1999 graduate of Warren Central High School, has made significant contributions to

the community as a
Christian minister for the
past 21 years.

A graduate of Warren
Central, Centre College and
The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary,
where he earned both the
Master of Divinity and
Doctor of Philosophy
degrees, Dr. Reynolds
served for nearly thirteen
years at Hillvue Heights
Church, where he helped
students and adults of all
ages grow in their faith.
While at Hillvue, he served
as president of the
Western Kentucky
University Campus
Ministries Association
from 2003-2007 and he
also served as pulpit
supply for regional
churches. During his time
at Hillvue, he preached in
over sixty churches or
ministry settings in
Warren County and the

surrounding area and served as an interim pastor in Franklin.

In 2016, Dr. Reynolds became senior pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Bowling Green. Because of the church's broadcast and livestream ministries, Dr. Reynolds is able to bring hope every Sunday to people in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church, in the 45-county WBKO-ABC broadcast area and around the world.

Dr. Reynolds has been invited to speak in multiple settings in Kentucky, Tennessee and Illinois, and has served as the spiritual guide for groups traveling to Greece and Israel. He also actively serves in various servant leadership capacities in the South Central Baptist Association and the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

In addition to his ministry, he has actively served the community in various volunteer roles. Dr. Reynolds served as a paraprofessional assistant football coach at Henry F. Moss Middle School in 2003 and Warren Central High School from 2004-2008. He has served as a volunteer coach for SKY Soccer, Warren County Pee Wee Baseball, Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Tee Ball, Warren County South Little League Baseball, Warren County Youth Basketball, Warren County Youth Girls' Basketball, Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Girls' Basketball and Warren County Youth Girls' Volleyball. He served on the board of Warren County Pee Wee Baseball and was a member of Rotary International.

Dr. Reynolds has served as a member of the Warren County Regional Jail Reentry Council and as a volunteer with Saturday Meals on Wheels. He is currently in his fifth year of service on the Site-Based Decision-Making Council of Jody Richards Elementary School and he currently serves as president of the South Warren Football Gridiron Club.

•Ms. Debbie Jones Richey, a 1973 graduate of Warren Central High School, is a retired educator after an exemplary career with WCPS as a teacher, counselor, assistant principal, principal and district administrator. She is a graduate of Western Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Science in business education, a

Master of Art in education
and Rank 1 in school
counseling.

In 1977, Ms. Richey began her educational career as a business teacher at Warren East High School. In addition to teaching, she coached the Warren East Raiderettes for 13 years. This team was very successful in their performances with regular halftime presentations, as well as performances at the Aloha Bowl, Rose Bowl Parade, Disney World and other prestigious events. In addition to her teaching duties, she also sponsored the school's Future Business Leaders of America Chapter, started the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Chapter at WEHS and was an original member of the Warren County School's drug and alcohol prevention team called KIDS.

In 1989, Richey continued her career at the newly built Greenwood High School as a guidance counselor and later became assistant principal. In 2001, she was hired to be principal at the new Briarwood Elementary School where she remained for ten years. After retiring, she came back to WCPS and served as director of principal leadership. She now works with WKU as a supervisor and mentor to student teachers, helping shape the future of education.

In addition to her professional work, Ms. Richey has made her mark in the community with service to various nonprofit organizations including Kids on the Block and Barren River Area Child Advocacy Center.

After the passing of her beloved son, Lance, in 2017, she also began working at Hardy & Son Funeral Homes, where she provides operational support, but more importantly, she serves to comfort grieving families. To this day, she continues this work in memory of her son and in honor of her daughter-in-law, Ashley Richey.

•Steve Riley, a 1976 graduate of Warren East High School, is an accomplished teacher, coach, administrator, and legislator. After graduating from Western Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Arts in history and government, a Master's degree in education and history, and a Rank 1 in school administration, Riley began his career in the Barren County Public Schools District in 1984.

During his tenure, he served as a classroom teacher, an administrator and a coach. Whether in the classroom or on the court, he knew how to connect with students and athletes in a way that helped them understand their value and reach their full potential. Even today, when he encounters his former students, he remembers significant details and moments from their lives.

He also served as head coach of the Barren County High School basketball team for 14 years, where he held the record for most wins in school history at 273. His time as coach included six district championships and two second-place finishes in the regional tournament.

In 2017, Riley was elected as a state representative and he continues to serve in this capacity today, advocating for our schools and striving to improve public education across the Commonwealth. He is also the recipient of several awards and recognitions including 2001-2002 4th Region Coach of the Year, KAHCF 2018 Legislator of the Year, 2019 KRA Legislative Affairs Award, the 2020-2021 KY Kids Champion for Children and the 2023 Kentucky High School Athletic Association Court of Honor for Coaches.

•Kim M. Thomas, a 1988 graduate of Warren East High School, has distinguished herself as a community leader, both by her professional accomplishments in banking, as well as through her commitment

to community service. Her career in banking spans more than 30 years of service to customers in south central Kentucky, including Warren, Barren, Simpson and Hart counties. She has risen to the position of regional senior vice president of retail banking of German American Bank, which includes nine branches and multiple employees.

Ms. Thomas is a 1992 graduate of Western Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Science in Finance, a 2000 graduate of Louisiana State University's Graduate School of Banking of the South and a graduate of the Kentucky Bankers Association Commercial Lending School and General Banking School.

While building a notable career in the financial industry, Ms. Thomas has proven herself as a selfless volunteer of her time and talents. Many in our community know her through her service with the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce as a board member from 2009 to 2021. She was also selected as the Athena Award Recipient in 2005.

She was the vice president for the Class of 2000 Leadership Bowling Green and a Bart Hagerman Leadership Award winner. She currently serves as a board member and chairman of the Bowling Green Area Chamber Foundation, as well as a current board member of the Bowling Green Area Economic Development Authority, WKU Real Estate Corporation, Barren

River Area Child Advocacy Center, and Boys and Girls Club of Bowling Green.

Ms. Thomas served as a previous board member and chairman of the Community Foundation of South Central Kentucky. She served as the chairman of the Distinguished Young Women of Warren County Program (formerly Warren County Junior Miss) for 25 years and serves as a regional director for the Distinguished Young Women of Kentucky. She is also a proud board member of the WCPS Education Foundation.

•Richard N. Wilson, a 1977 graduate of Warren Central High School, worked his way up to market president within what is now Truist Bank. While attending WCHS, he started his career working

in banking at Bowling
Green Bank and Trust
Company.

During his 43-year career,
23 as bank president, Mr.
Wilson made giving back
to his hometown a priority.
He is a longtime supporter
of Med Center Health's
Charity Ball. His pro-
growth attitude assisted
Commonwealth Health
Corporation, the parent
company of Med Center
Health, in accessing the
needed capital to facilitate
the expansion of the
original one-southcentral
Kentucky.

During his career, he led
Bowling Green Bank and
its successor organizations
from being the smallest
bank in Bowling Green to
being the largest bank in
town for 15 years until his
retirement in 2021. Under
his leadership, Bowling
Green Bank also earned

the distinction of being the top performing bank in the state of Kentucky.

Mr. Wilson was also the founding sponsor of the BB&T Soap Box Derby and the Concerts in the Park series, both long-standing staple community events. He has been involved with many local nonprofits over the years including chairman of the following organizations: Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, Inter-Modal Transportation Authority, Inc. (Kentucky Transpark), Bowling Green Area Economic Development Authority, Junior Achievement of South Central Kentucky, Junior Achievement's Hall of Fame Selection Committee, the Capitol Arts Alliance, Kids on the Block, WKU National Alumni Association and the WKU Business College

Advisory Council. He is a current board member of the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center Foundation and the Intermodal Transportation Authority. For 27 consecutive years, he has served on various boards associated with the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce.

Wilson was the co-chair of the Chamber's The Leader in Me Capital Campaign which brought leadership programming to area school districts.